

COVID-19 Antigen Testing Best Practices

The purpose of this guidance is to support communities, local leadership, and public health in collaborating with agencies and organizations in creating policies for operations during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

- It is vitally important that communities take all necessary measures to limit the spread of the SARS-CoV-2
- Policies should be flexible and nimble in responding to new information, and test administrators must be willing to refine approaches when specific policies are not working
- Agencies must take a multi-pronged, layered approach to protect their populations.
- Agencies must be in close communication and coordinate with state and local public health authorities, local physicians, and other medical experts
- Policymakers should acknowledge that COVID- 19 policies are intended to mitigate, not eliminate, risk
- No single action or set of actions will completely eliminate the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission, but the implementation of several coordinated interventions can greatly reduce that risk
- Virologic testing is an important part of the overall public health strategy to limit the spread of COVID-19. Virologic testing detects the viral RNA from a respiratory (usually nasal) swab specimen

Supplies Needed:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): N95 equivalent or higher-level respirator (or facemask if respirators are not available), facemasks, gloves, gowns, eye protection (goggles or disposable face shields that cover the front and sides of the face), and physical barriers (e.g., plexiglass).
- Cloth face coverings or facemasks for people being tested
- Sanitation and hygiene: Cleaning and disinfection supplies; regular trash bags and cans; touchless dispensers with hand sanitizer;¹ handwashing station with potable water, soap and paper towels; and supplies for cleaning a spill of transport media or biological specimens
- Thermometers: non-contact digital thermometers and extra batteries
- Registration and interview materials:² folding chairs, folding table, clipboards, pens, markers, paper forms, laptops or tablets, software,³ and access to power
- Test kits: plastic specimen transport bags, sterile swabs, specimen collection vials with transport media, and prefilled labels.
- Educational materials: information in appropriate languages and for appropriate literacy levels on SARS-CoV-2 testing, test results and what

they mean, quarantine and isolation, and how to prevent the spread of COVID-19

- General supplies: tape to mark lines for 6 feet of separation

Notes:

¹ Alcohol-based hand rub with 60%-95% alcohol.

² Use items made of materials that can be cleaned between individuals.

³ Contact tracing software being used by public health authority or spreadsheet with fields for demographic information, location and date of testing, and results.

Planning:

- Coordinate planning between the test coordinator and test administrators who will perform the testing
- If testing is not urgent, discuss considerations for what day the specimen collection will be performed
- Develop a plan for staffing and testing teams
- PPE requirements vary based on the staff's role in specimen collection and whether they will be 6 feet away from the person being tested:
 - Gloves and facemask are needed for staff who will not be directly involved in specimen collection or who will be **greater than 6 feet away** from the person being tested
 - Gown, N95 equivalent or higher-level respirator (or facemask if a respirator is not available), gloves, and eye protection are needed for staff collecting specimens or working **within 6 feet** of the person being tested
- Consider whether you can minimize the number of staff needed and the amount of PPE used by having individuals collect their own specimens while being supervised by healthcare providers who are at least 6 feet away
- Ensure that all staff involved in specimen collection are appropriately trained and wear PPE as appropriate to their role
 - Training includes proper use of PPE, including donning and doffing; symptom screening procedure; and proper technique for specimen collection
 - For staff having direct contact with participants or specimens, gloves should be changed and hands sanitized after every participant. Staff not having regular direct contact with participants or specimens should change their gloves and sanitize their hands after contacting individuals or potentially contaminated surfaces, or as specified below
 - Staff should change or clean and sanitize eye protection when it is soiled (e.g., after a patient sneezes or coughs onto it) or whenever they touch it or take it off
 - Staff should change their facemasks whenever they are soiled or become wet or whenever they touch them or take them off
 - Staff should change their gown when it becomes soiled or when they have more than minimal contact with the person being swabbed. They may wear the same gown to swab more than one person, provided they minimize contact with the person being swabbed

- Consider the physical space where the testing will be performed
- Clearly communicate to potential participants who is eligible for testing and any limits on your capacity for testing
- Consider coordinating with your local health department on reporting information on test results
- Anticipate how to address individuals' mobility issues and language barriers
- Develop a plan for isolating individuals who are symptomatic or whose test results are returned positive
- Develop a risk communication plan for addressing individuals' concerns about confidentiality, potential stigma or undesirable outcomes based on test results (being moved to a new location, separated from family, etc.), and any distrust. Plan a response to situations when individuals refuse to be tested
- Develop a plan for coordinating with local EMS and healthcare providers in case individuals need medical attention
- Notify all individuals who are scheduled to be tested that they should pre-register all of their information at: <https://register.txrapidtest.org/> to generate a QR Code which may be scanned by test administrators in lieu of a driver's license or manually entering the information. Individuals to be tested should take a picture of the QR code generated or print a copy of the QR code to bring to the testing location.
- Develop a plan for disposing of biohazard waste (used specimen collection materials; soiled gloves, masks, etc.)

Physical space:

- In general, an outdoor location for mass testing events is preferred because it has better ventilation and more room for social distancing. Provide climate-controlled or climate-protected rest areas (large enough for social distancing) for staff
- If an outdoor location is not feasible, large indoor spaces (e.g., gymnasiums, large meeting rooms) are best, where sufficient space can be maintained between stations (i.e., periphery greater than 6 feet apart)
- For indoor specimen collection activities, designate separate spaces for each specimen collection testing station, either rooms with doors that close fully or protected spaces removed from other stations by distance and physical barriers, such as privacy curtains and plexiglass
 - To prevent inducing coughing/sneezing in an environment where multiple people are present and could be exposed, avoid collecting specimens in open-style housing spaces with current residents or in multi-use areas where other activities are occurring

- Do not keep testing and other supplies in the immediate specimen collection area to avoid the possibility of contaminating test materials. Consider having each person carry their individual test card and swab from the check-in area to the specimen collection area
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces often using an Environmental Protection Agency-registered disinfectant:
 - At least hourly for surfaces within 6 feet of where specimen collection was performed;
 - Anytime the surface is visibly soiled or within 6 feet of an uncovered cough or sneeze;
 - At the end of shift for all surfaces and equipment in the specimen collection area

Flow for testing multiple people in succession:

- Have all staff involved in the testing conduct a test on themselves to verify all registration/reporting functions are working and the testing process is appropriate.
- Provide surgical masks or cloth face coverings for those undergoing testing in the area being used for the testing event. Cloth face coverings should not be used by:
 - Children under age two (2), or
 - Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- As able, all participants undergoing testing should wear a surgical mask or cloth face covering throughout the process, only removing it during swabbing.
- Develop a plan of how individuals will flow through functional stations, in one direction (see example in Figure below)
- Designate stations with clear functional roles, define responsibilities for staff in each station, and provide PPE guidance to staff as appropriate to them. To prevent contamination, testing staff in full PPE should not leave the testing area
- Pilot the processes and flow before the actual testing event. The staff could be tested at this time
- Place touchless hand sanitizers between each station and at the facility's entrance
- Coordinate so that the flow of individuals is steady, moves in one direction, and does not lead to crowding
- Minimize the amount of time an individual spends in the testing area.
- Individuals awaiting swabbing should not wait within 6 feet of where swabbing is being done or downstream from the area if the indoor space has directional airflow
- Have the person being swabbed face away from others so that if they cough or sneeze, the respiratory droplets will not be directed toward another person or space where others will walk

- Maintain at least **6 feet of distance** between individuals and use physical barriers where appropriate. In situations where people will form lines, encourage people to stay 6 feet apart by providing signs or other visual cues, such as tape or chalk marks
- If participants are already cohorted (e.g., by class or workgroup), consider testing them together to limit their exposures to people in other groups.
- Consider processing groups together and consider extra space that might be needed to accommodate multiple people being tested.

